

The Bissonette Property:

Integrating Community into Public Land Management in Hinesburg, VT



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A. Introduction

This study was commissioned by the Hinesburg Land Trust (HLT) during the fall of 2007 to a group of five senior students as a part of the Middlebury College Environmental Studies Senior Seminar. The HLT along with a number of local, state, and federal stakeholders recently negotiated the donation of 301 acres of forest and wetlands, informally dubbed the Bissonette Property, to the town of Hinesburg for conservation and public use. These roughly 300 acres are a part of a larger conservation effort (627 acres), the LaPlatte Headwaters Initiative, aimed at preserving the town's rural agricultural heritage and production as well as ensuring that the landscape will continue to provide clean drinking water, wildlife habitat, and open space for recreation. Working with Andrea Morgante, a HLT board member, we developed two main project goals. First, we wanted to raise awareness among the residents of Hinesburg about the 301 acres of new public land, as many people are not aware of this resource. Secondly, the HLT was worried that the public voice was being left out of the management planning process. Thus we set out to solicit input from the general public and local constituency groups, through surveying and interviews, for their opinions on recreational use options on, and management of, the Bissonette Property. In order to develop the survey, we attended a Greenspace forum at the Hinesburg town hall to get a stronger sense of local land management concerns. We distributed our survey at the local grocery store (Lantman's), the library, the town hall, and on a neighborhood online forum. It is hoped that this project, alongside the HLT's interim management plan, will help inform Hinesburg's Select Board and Steering Committee as it begins to develop the long-term management plan for the property.

Background and Current Status of Bissonette Property

The town of Hinesburg, tucked away at the foot of the Green Mountains some 15 miles southeast of Burlington, embodies much of the spirit of what one might think of as a

traditional Vermont town. Hinesburg, population 4,427, is made up of a small village marked by the town hall, several churches, the Hinesburg Community School, and the local grocery store.¹ Beyond the village lies the remainder of the slightly more than 25,000 acres of land, much of which exists in patchworks of farmland alternating with forests. The people of Hinesburg, as expressed in the Greenspace forum, are interested in protecting their rural landscape for both the maintenance of agriculture as a part of the local economy and for aesthetic reasons. Furthermore, there is interest in the preservation of biodiversity and ecologically significant areas. Working with conservation organizations such as the Hinesburg and Vermont Land Trusts, the town has worked to preserve important parcels of land.

Over the last 30 years, Vermont has been confronted with an increasing amount of residential and commercial development pressure, especially from population centers like Burlington, Essex Junction, and Williston. One response has been to establish both local and statewide conservation organizations, such as the two land trusts previously mentioned. Founded in 1977, the Vermont Land Trust states its goal as “permanently conserving productive, recreational, and scenic lands vital to Vermont's rural economy and environment” and aims to incorporate economic growth and conservation into a sustainable future for Vermont.² Through donations and the purchase of conservation easements, the VLT has permanently protected over 465,000 acres of land (approximately 8% of the privately owned land in Vermont), including more than 615 farms.

Following this example, many local land trusts have sprung up around the state. One such group, the Hinesburg Land Trust, was started 20 years ago by a group of citizens interested in land-use planning and conservation. The HLT has conserved over 600 acres of

¹ <http://healthvermont.gov/research/2004pop/TABLE304.pdf> 2004 Vermont Population Estimate

² <http://www.vlt.org/fact.html>

land for its agricultural, recreational, and/or wildlife value.³ In its most recent project, as of November 1, 2007, the HLT worked with the VLT and the Trust for Public Land⁴ to procure donations towards the conservation of part of the Bissonette Property.

The LaPlatte Headwaters Initiative focuses on the conservation of 627 acres of agricultural land, forests, wetlands, and a riparian corridor at the headwaters of the LaPlatte River (Map 1). In accordance with the desire to preserve many aspects of Hinesburg's rural character and landscape, the initial management plan specifically provides for the conservation of and continued production on 158 acres of prime farmland and protection and restoration of 5.3 miles of stream and surrounding wetlands. Of particular importance to the residents of Hinesburg and this project, the remaining 301 acres of land will be designated for conservation and public use.

The LaPlatte Headwaters Initiative is an excellent illustration of how local conservation and landowner interests can be brought together with state and federal objectives to achieve a variety of goals. For example, the discovery of summer roosting habitat of the endangered Indiana Bat on the property summoned a substantial amount of federal funding for the acquisition of 300 acres—a portion of the property—and assured the support of the Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife as technical advisors in the development of the management plan. To satisfy several of the funding requirements of the state and federal agencies, HLT and VLT, in conjunction with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation, and the Chittenden County Forester, developed an interim management plan for the Bissonette

³ <http://www.hinesburglandtrust.org> The HLT along with a number of local, state, and federal stakeholders conserves and manages lands through a variety of mechanisms; these include acquiring lands, establishing conservation easements, making arrangements with private landowners, and sharing management responsibility with state institutions. The 600 acres mentioned above is not maintained or owned in a uniform fashion but includes a range of conservation strategies.

⁴ <http://www.tpl.org> The Trust for Public Land is a national, nonprofit, land conservation organization that conserves land to ensure livable communities for generations to come. In the context of the LaPlatte Headwaters Initiative the TPL functioned as a holding company to help structure, negotiate, and complete the land transaction between the Bissonette family, VLT, HLT, and the town of Hinesburg.

Property prior to conveyance to the town. The town selectboard is responsible for developing the long-term management plan and has asked the HLT to coordinate this effort. A committee with representatives from the conservation commission, planning commission, recreation commission, trails committee, Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST), and hunters will draft the plan that will be adopted by the selectboard with approvals from the Vermont Departments of Fish & Wildlife and Forest, Parks, & Recreation.

Although the interim management plan for the Bissonette Property has a strong foundation, the HLT has worried that local public input has been overlooked because of the involvement of multiple project partners. For example, many of the management strategies outlined in the interim plan and which will be incorporated into the long-term plan, are dictated by the need to protect the area as bat habitat. Local input is essential because the 301 acres of new town forest are intended for use by the residents of Hinesburg. Furthermore, when incorporating public input into conservation projects like the Bissonette Property, underrepresented constituents, like hunters who may want to use the new public land on a regular basis, often remain unheard and are drowned out by other interest groups. Thus our task was to elicit local input on the Bissonette Property from as many different people and interest groups as possible in order to enhance the long-term management plan and maximize the benefits to the Hinesburg community.

General Goals for Bissonette Property

The management plan currently under development for the Bissonette Property is quite extensive, ecologically speaking, and forward-thinking as it incorporates elements of resilience thinking.⁵ Vermont land development is increasing at 2.5 times the rate of the population growth, necessitating the protection of sensitive forested areas and drinking

⁵ “Resilience thinking,” as described by Brian Walker and David Salt in Resilience Thinking (2006), embraces the dynamic nature of the world and approaches socio-ecological systems with the understanding that variability must be accepted as a part of life. Thus, conservation strategies within this line of thinking must purposely create space for such variability and allow socio-ecological systems to absorb disturbances without crossing over into a new ecosystem regime.

water sources.⁶ Along these lines, protecting and restoring the LaPlatte River, a drinking water source for 68,000 people in Chittenden County, as it flows through the Bissonette Property before draining into Lake Champlain is a primary conservation objective for the Bissonette Property. Specifically, the draft management plan allows for the stream to regain its natural meandering stream channel and to improve the quality of wetlands to reduce pollution run-off into the river. Other general goals for the Bissonette Property include the protection of animal habitat and maintaining healthy and diverse natural communities. As mentioned above, the Bissonette Property is an important summer roosting site for the federally endangered Indiana Bat. Therefore, many aspects of the management plan will be driven by the needs of the Indiana Bat and specific measures will be taken by the Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife to protect and maintain roosting habitat, namely standing dead trees. The Bissonette Property also includes significant areas of clayplain forest, transitional hardwood talus woodland, and 225 acres of deer yards that will be conserved.

Undertaking this project provides a continuation of a goal important to many Vermonters: the maintenance of rural character and forested/agricultural landscape. Linking private and public property together in the Champlain Valley is essential to ensure that the Hinesburg landscape remains connected to Lake Champlain to the west, the Green Mountains to the east, Shelburne Pond to the north, and the Bristol Cliffs Wilderness to the south. As a link in this larger network, the 301 acres of town-owned forest will provide public recreation and education, while the 158 acres of farmland will help maintain the pastoral Vermont landscape and will enhance the local agricultural economy.

⁶ <http://www.hinesburglandtrust.org>

Map 1 showing the LaPlatte Headwaters Initiative. Parcels 1 and 3 comprise the 301 acres donated to the town of Hinesburg and are the focus of this paper.



B. Methodology

This project utilized two methods, a written/digital survey and interviews, to elucidate the public's opinions and ideas on recreation and management issues on the Bissonette Property. Through the empirical evidence gathered from the survey and anecdotal evidence from the interviews we hoped to gain the most holistic perspective on public opinion as possible.

Survey Development

The survey portion of our project was developed in close collaboration with our community partner and with the assistance of Dr. Michelle McCauley, Associate Professor of Psychology at Middlebury College. The survey went through three drafting stages over a period of a week before our questions were finalized (Appendix I). From a formatting perspective, the survey needed to be concise but also had to contain enough relevant information to inform the public about the Bissonette Property. We thus limited the survey to one page, front and back, so that respondents could complete the survey in less than 10 minutes. Furthermore, at the suggestion of J.S. Woodward of Middlebury Area Land Trust, the survey was printed on brightly colored paper to attract attention. The paper copy of the survey was used for soliciting respondents at Lantman's Grocery Store, the town hall, and the town library. The survey was also formatted in a digital version on SurveyMonkey⁷ and subsequently posted on the town website and on the Front Porch Forum,⁸ providing another means for constituents to respond.

From a content perspective, the ultimate goal of this survey was to elicit the community's opinions on potential use and management issues on the Bissonette Property; however, it was necessary to contain those opinions within the parameters of some pre-determined management possibilities. The survey was primarily structured with accessible,

⁷ www.surveymonkey.com

⁸ www.frontporchforum.com

multiple-choice questions, but also included the opportunity for additional, open-ended input. Many of the questions we developed asked for responses on a continuum to more accurately gauge attitudes and opinions beyond a simple yes/no. We also tried to approach issues from a variety of angles to get a more complete view of people's opinions.

Survey Strategies

The main goal of our survey was to assess the range of opinions about the Bissonette Property. For this reason we did not focus on making our survey statistically correct by surveying a random selection of people. We set up a table in Lantman's grocery store and asked people to fill out the survey. Lantman's is a popular place where many town residents and commuters that pass through Hinesburg stop to buy groceries. We set up a table for about 2 hours for 5 days during the week of October 29th targeting the busiest times of day (4-6 pm on weekdays and 1-3 on Sunday).

In addition to tabling at Lantman's, we distributed surveys at the town hall and the library, both of which are common town gathering points. We also posted the survey online on the home page of the Hinesburg town website and circulated the SurveyMonkey link on the Front Porch Forum, an email listserve designed to share local news and information within a designated neighborhood. We received 218 surveys from these methods; 124 were filled out at Lantman's, another 60 came from the library, the town hall, and an envelope left at Lantman's, and 34 were filled out online. Results from the survey were compiled and analyzed on SurveyMonkey.

As previously noted, another goal of our survey was to spread awareness of the Bissonette Property to residents of Hinesburg. To this end, we also published two articles in local newspapers: the weekly Vermont Times Sentinel and the bi-monthly Hinesburg Record. These articles informed people that we were conducting a survey and thanked the residents of Hinesburg for giving us their opinions (Appendices II & III).

Survey Evaluation

Given our constraints on time and access to the residents of Hinesburg, we thought the town grocery store was an effective way to reach a large number and diversity of residents. The survey provided a tangible way for residents to express their opinions in writing, as opposed to voicing their thoughts at an open forum like a town meeting, which can be dominated by strong personalities. The written survey can be a more democratic way of gathering opinions because everyone has the same amount of space to respond, and like voting, it is anonymous. Furthermore, the survey was effective at simultaneously educating the public about the project. A number of questions contained information about the property and/or conservation goals (Appendix I; questions 3, 4, 10, 12, and 13) and respondents frequently asked more in-depth questions about the land while filling out the survey. Respondents were also given the Hinesburg Land Trust's pamphlet on the Bissonette Property while they were being solicited for their input. As this was the first encounter with the Bissonette project for many of the respondents, the survey acted as an effective marketing tool.

Despite these strengths, the survey and our survey method encountered several drawbacks. A few questions on the survey were unclear to the respondents, most notably questions 4B – 7. Question 4B did not specify that the three most important activities to the respondent and their family should be chosen from question 4A. The wording of question 6 also often confused people. Question 7 was frequently skipped, presumably because respondents did not realize that it continued onto the back page. In addition, some respondents failed to complete the entire backside of the survey.

The major methodological drawbacks of our survey were inconvenience and potential over-representation of the already invested and interested population. Our survey was conducted between the hours of 4:00-6:00 pm, with the exception of Sunday, which is

the busiest time of day for most people. Residents coming into the store were rushing between work and home and were frequently accompanied by children. This made people less willing to take the survey, and when they did agree to participate, they may have rushed through the questions without much thought. Also, because our method was somewhat inconvenient, it is possible that people uninterested in conservation initiatives or who were in disagreement with the project declined to fill out the survey. By the same token, people who were already interested in the Bissonette Property and/or other conservation initiatives may have been more likely to participate in the survey. Additionally, there was a degree of human ‘error’ that occurred during the survey period. After surveying for a substantial amount of time, one begins to realize which type of people are more likely to answer the survey and those who are not, which can lead to only approaching (through a degree of profiling) those that seem likely to agree to answering the survey. This again could result in an inaccurate representation of the whole town’s opinions.

Interview Structure

In addition to our survey, we thought it would be helpful to interview more closely members of the community that represent broader constituency groups. These individuals include: Frank Twarog, chair of the Hinesburg Trails Committee; Hans Jenny, president of Fellowship of the Wheel; Jane Lazorchak, coordinator of landowner incentive program for the Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife; Thom Fleury, an assistant principal at the Hinesburg Community School; Tom Buzzell, a father of four and a local resident of Hinesburg; Wayne Bissonette; Colin McNaull, a property owner with land bordering part of the Bissonette Property; and Kristen Brissee, wildlife biologist at the Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife. Beyond the basic questions of the survey, which sought to define general preferences for potential uses of the Bissonette Property, these interviews attempted to

address interests and concerns of specific local constituency groups and other organized groups of stakeholders. Our questions included the following:

- What is the intended purpose of your group?
- How long has the group been around and what are its demographics?
- Has your group ever been involved in any other public land projects like the current Town Forest, etc.?
- What has your process of becoming involved generally been?
- How do you envision your group's involvement in the Bissonette Property?
- Are there any potential concerns with your group's use of the land and interactions with other constituencies?

The results from our interviews are compiled as transcripts (Appendix IV).

C. Results

Survey Results Summary

- Eighty percent out of the 218 people who took the survey are residents of Hinesburg (Figure 1).
- Seventy-four percent of 212 respondents are currently not involved in any organizations in the town of Hinesburg (Figure 2).
- Seventy-three percent of 207 respondents have heard about the donation of part of the Bissonette Property as a town forest (Figure 3).
- Fifty percent of respondents said they are very likely to use the town forest for hiking. Respondents also indicated interest in using the new town forest for cross-country skiing (33%), bird watching (30%), and sledding (28%). The majority of the respondents are highly unlikely to use the forest for horse travel (57%), hunting (58%) and snowmobiling (63%), while interest in mountain biking was divided between those who were highly unlikely to bike on the property (28%) and those very likely to (23%) (Figure 4).
- Twenty-five of the 210 respondents strongly disagreed with opening the land to other recreational activities during hunting seasons. However, 22% strongly agreed that other activities should be allowed to coexist with hunting (Figure 5).
- Respondents mainly anticipate using the new town forest one time per month or less throughout the year (Figure 6).
- Eighty-two percent of 200 respondents said they enjoy trails through both fields and wooded areas (Figure 7).
- Seventy-eight percent of 194 respondents agreed with the proposed idea of building a series of boardwalks through the wetlands in the northern part of the property (Figure 8).
- Sixty-three percent of 179 respondents said they would be interested in helping maintain the trails or would be willingly involved in other conservation efforts on the land (Figure 9).
- The most well-liked name for the property according to the survey is the Bissonette Farm, with 34% of 185 respondents strongly agreeing with the name. The second most favorable name is the Bissonette Town Forest, followed by Owl's Knoll and then the Hinesburg Riparian Town Forest (Figure 10).
- Seventy percent of 194 respondents strongly agreed that the use of the new town forest should be integrated into the school curriculum (Figure 11).

- The majority of respondents said conservation of Indiana Bat habitat, 64% of 194 respondents, and wetlands, 80% of 194 respondents, are either important or very important (Figure 12).
- In response to a question about people's values of the land, 63% of 197 respondents said maintaining Vermont's agricultural landscape was very important. This was followed by sixty-two percent who said maintaining open/green space was very important, 58% of respondents who deemed public access to land as very important and, finally, 55% of respondents who considered preserving rare ecosystem/species very important (Figure 13).
- Seventy-two percent of 175 respondents said they would be willing to let the public cross their land to create a trail network throughout the town (Figure 14).

Figures

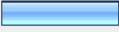
Are you a resident of Hinesburg		
		Response Percent Response Count
Yes		80.3% 171
No		19.7% 42
answered question		213
skipped question		5

Figure 1. The percentage of people who took the survey that are currently living in Hinesburg.

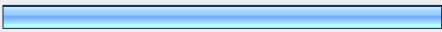
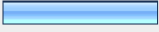
Are you currently involved in any organizations in the Town of Hinesburg, such as PTA, town planning, Fire Department, etc.?		
		Response Percent Response Count
No		74.1% 157
Yes (please list)		25.9% 55
answered question		212
skipped question		6

Figure 2. The percentage of people who took the survey that are currently involved with any organization in the town of Hinesburg.

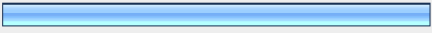
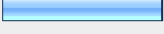
Have you heard that 300 acres of the Bissonette Farm are being donated to the Town of Hinesburg?		
		Response Percent Response Count
Yes		72.9% 151
No		27.1% 56
answered question		207
skipped question		11

Figure 3. The percentage of people that have heard about the approximately 300 acres of the Bissonette Property that were donated to the town of Hinesburg.

A. Keeping in mind that the ultimate goal of this property is conservation of natural resources, what sort of recreational activities would you like to see available on this property? Please indicate how likely you and your family are to engage in the following activities on this land, on a scale of 1-5.

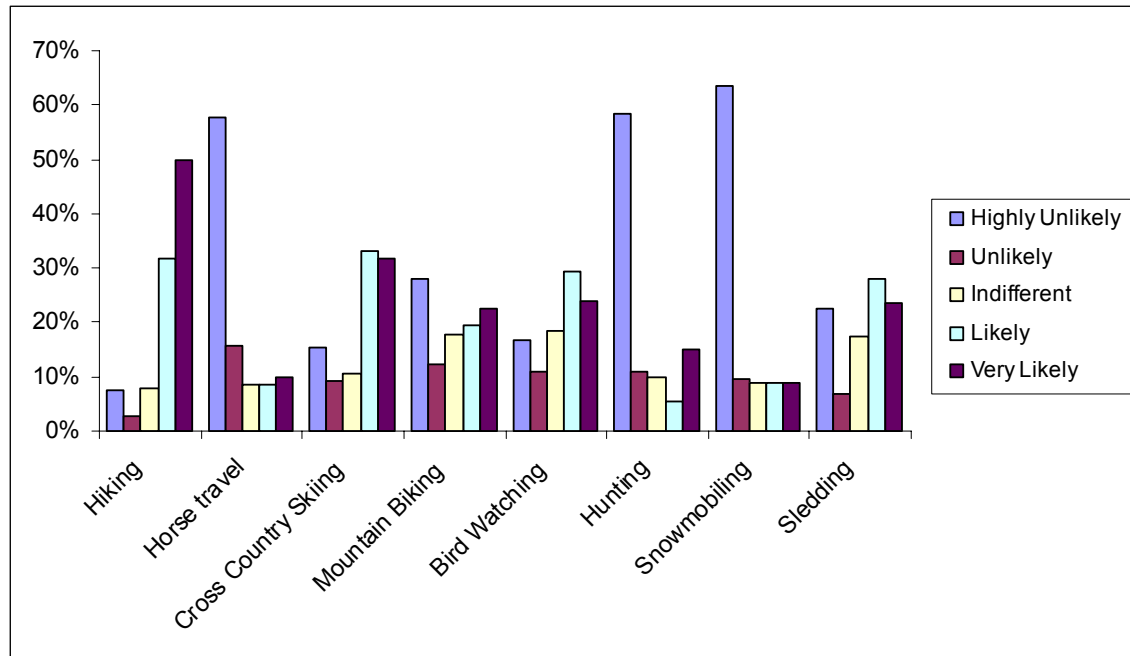


Figure 4. The percentage of people who would likely engage in a variety of outdoor activities on the Bissonette Property.

B. From the activities listed above, will you please rank the three most important activities to you and your family.

Of the 172 people that ranked their number one choice of activities from the list (Figure 4), 115 people (67%) said that hiking was the most important to them and their family. The second most important activity was cross-country skiing, which received 49 votes (34%). The activity third most important to respondents was sledding, with 26 respondents (24%). However, when disregarding whether people noted each activity as their first, second, or third choice, mountain biking was slightly more important than sledding, receiving 50 total votes (12% of all votes). Bird watching also received a fairly significant number of votes, 36 (9% of total), which was only 6 votes less than sledding. Hunting, horse travel, and snowmobiling all received significantly less responses, at 24 (6%), 16 (4%), and 14 (3%) respectively.

Are there activities listed above that you foresee interfering with each other on this public land?

Fifty-six percent of 196 respondents believed that some activities would interfere with each other. Of those respondents that believed there might be conflict, the majority addressed the issue of hunting and snowmobiling (and/or other motorized activities) interfering with other recreational activities. To a much lesser extent, respondents also expressed concerns about mountain biking, horse travel, and dog walking.

Should this land be available for other recreational activities during hunting seasons?

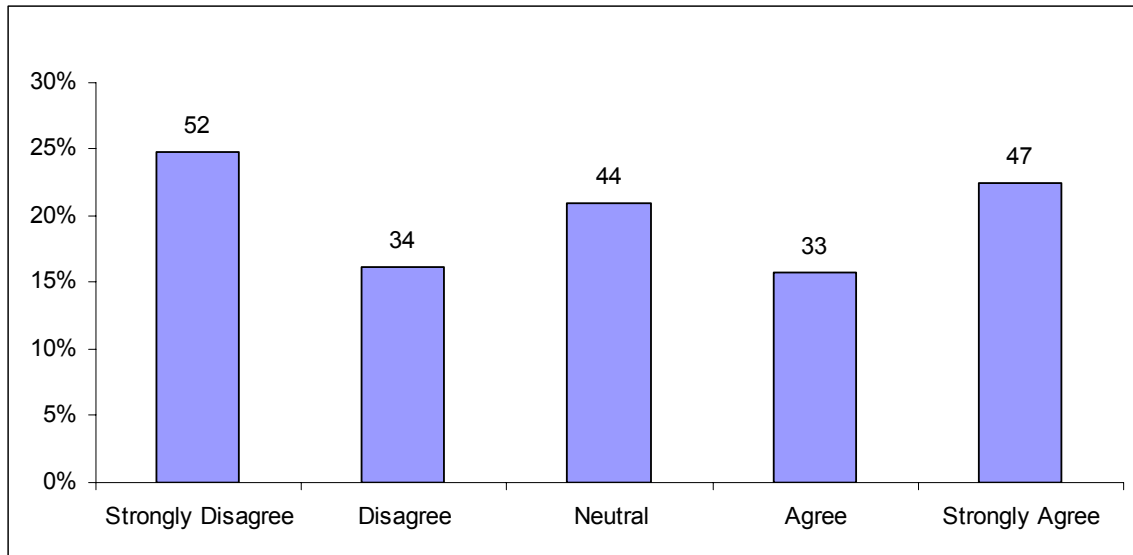


Figure 5. The percentage of the extent to which respondents agree with allowing other recreational activities on the Bissonette Property during hunting season.

Please indicate how frequently you and your family would use this land during the following seasons (Summer, Fall, Winter, and Spring):

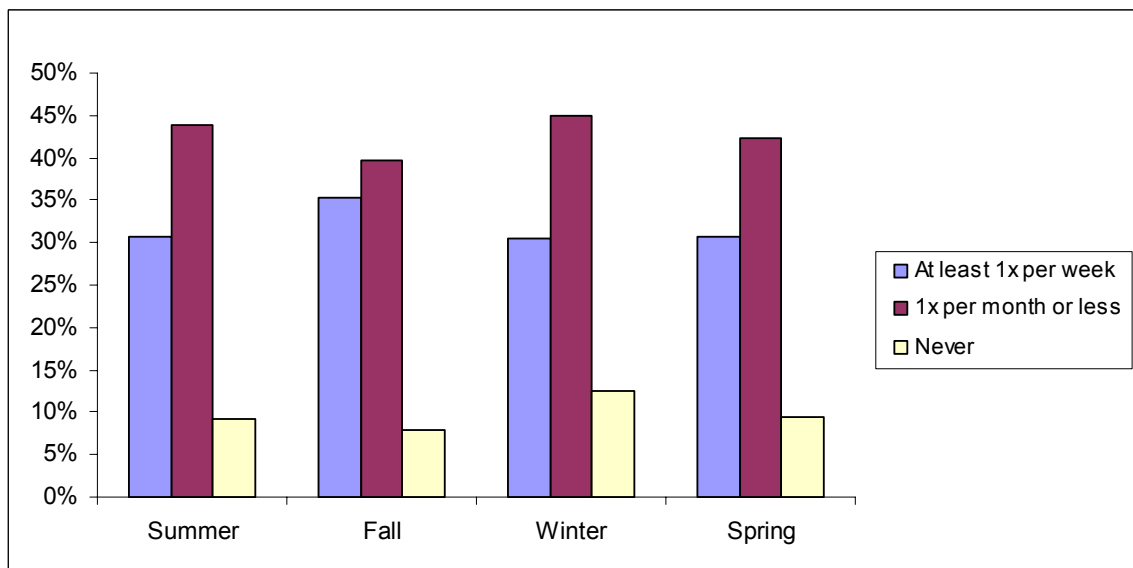


Figure 6. The percentage of respondents that anticipate visiting the Bissonette Property more or less frequently, based on the season.

When using walking/hiking trail do you prefer trails through fields, wooded areas, or both fields and wooded areas?

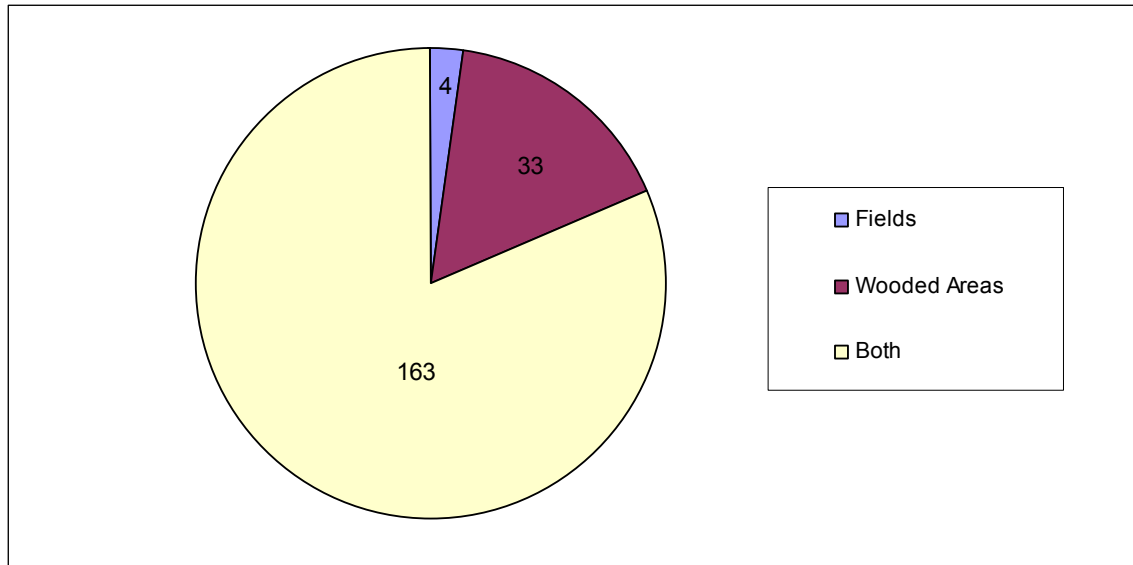


Figure 7. The environment through which respondents prefer to hike or walk.

It has been suggested that a series of boardwalks be built through the wetlands in the northern part of the property. Do you think this is a good idea?

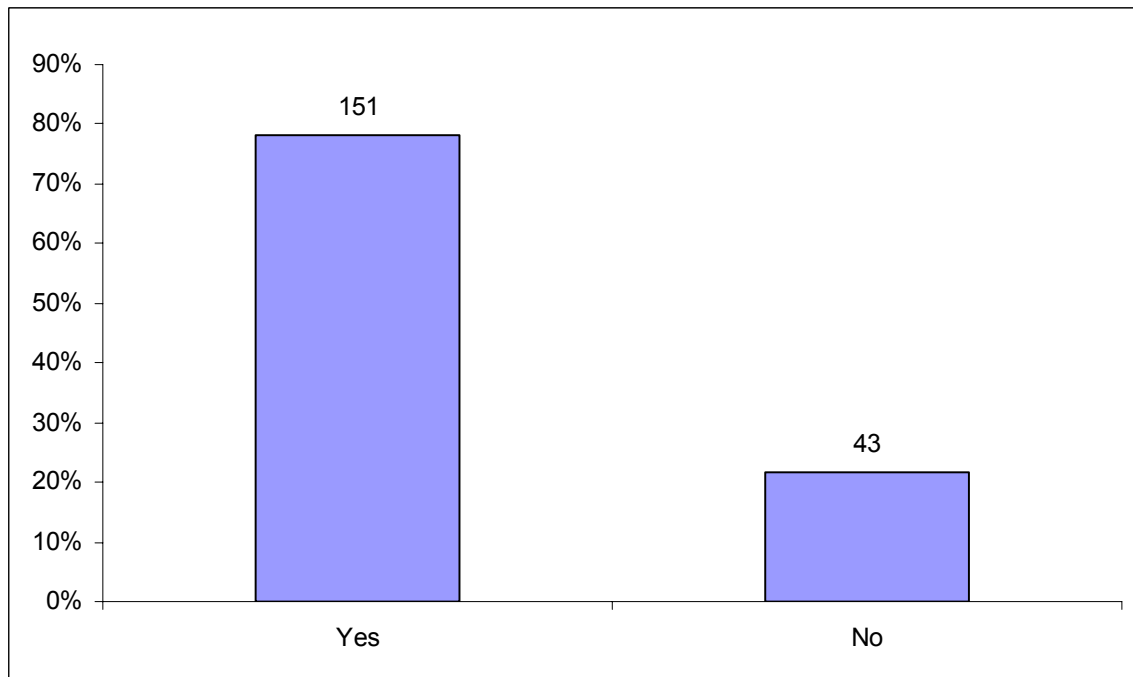


Figure 8. The percentage of people in favor of or opposed to building boardwalks through the wetland in the northern part of the property.

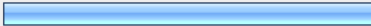
Would you be interested in helping maintain the trails or other conservation efforts on the land?		
	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes 	63.1%	113
No 	36.9%	66
answered question		179
skipped question		39

Figure 9. The percentage of people who would be willing to help maintain the trails or engage in other conservation efforts on the land.

Below is a list of suggested permanent names for this property. Please indicate your preferences							
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Rating Average	Response Count
Owl's Knoll	17.0% (25)	8.2% (12)	36.7% (54)	20.4% (30)	17.7% (26)	1.00	147
Bissonette Town Forest	10.9% (17)	7.1% (11)	20.5% (32)	34.6% (54)	26.9% (42)	1.00	156
Hinesburg Riparian Town Forest	32.9% (48)	23.3% (34)	26.0% (38)	8.9% (13)	8.9% (13)	1.00	146
Bissonette Farm	13.4% (21)	10.2% (16)	19.1% (30)	23.6% (37)	33.8% (53)	1.00	157
Other (please specify)							17
answered question							185
skipped question							33

Figure 10. Preferences of names for this property.

A curriculum that meets state science and social studies standards has been developed to facilitate the use of this land as an outdoor classroom for the local schools. Would you like to see the property used for this purpose?

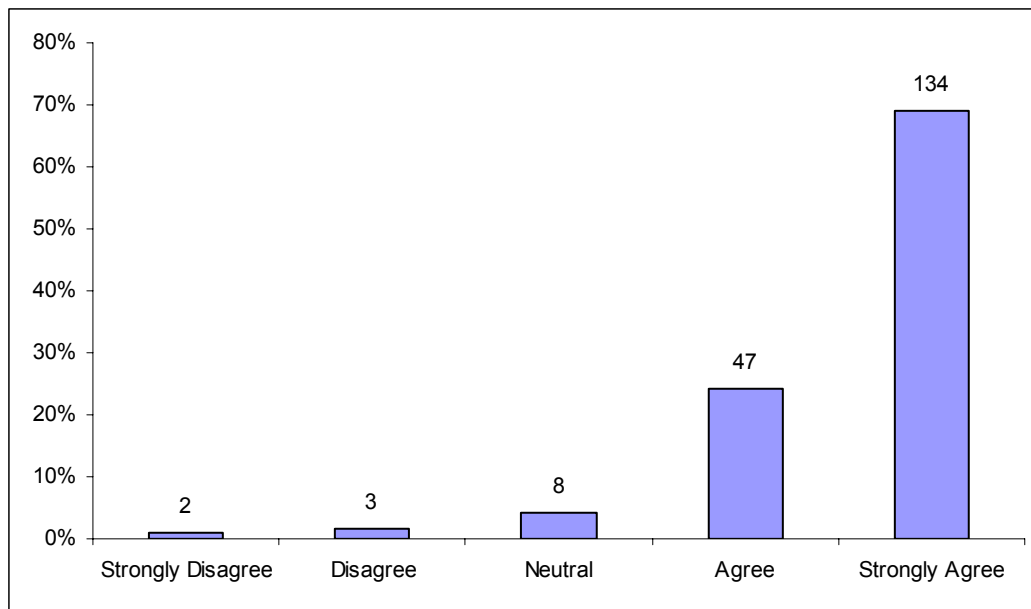


Figure 11. The percentage of people who responded along a spectrum to the idea of incorporating the new town forest into the school curriculum.

This property was purchased in part with federal and state money to protect the endangered Indiana Bat and to conserve local wetlands through the VT Clean and Clear Initiative. How important are these to you?						
	Very Unimportant	Unimportant	Neutral	Important	Very Important	Response Count
Indiana Bat	6.2% (12)	5.2% (10)	24.2% (47)	26.3% (51)	38.1% (74)	194
Wetlands	2.6% (5)	2.6% (5)	14.4% (28)	29.4% (57)	51.0% (99)	194
<i>answered question</i>						197
<i>skipped question</i>						21

Figure 12. The importance of conserving the Indiana Bat habitat and wetlands on the Bissonette Property.

How important are the following factors to you?						
	Very Unimportant	Unimportant	Neutral	Important	Very Important	Response Count
Public access to land	3.6% (7)	1.0% (2)	8.2% (16)	29.6% (58)	57.7% (113)	196
Maintaining open/ green space	3.6% (7)	0.5% (1)	9.3% (18)	24.2% (47)	62.4% (121)	194
Preserving rare ecosystems/ species	3.6% (7)	2.1% (4)	15.4% (30)	23.6% (46)	55.4% (108)	195
Maintaining VT's agricultural landscape	3.1% (6)	2.1% (4)	9.9% (19)	22.4% (43)	62.5% (120)	192
answered question						197
skipped question						21

Figure 13. The importance of public access to land, maintenance of open space, preservation of rare ecosystems and species, and maintenance of Vermont's agricultural landscape.

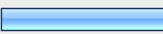
Would you be willing to let the public cross your land to create a trail network throughout the town?		
	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes 	72.0%	126
No 	28.0%	49
answered question		175
skipped question		43

Figure 14. The percentage of respondents who would be willing to let the public cross their land in order to create a larger trail network.

D. Data Analysis

Recreational Interests

Our analysis is based on both the completed surveys and the results of our interviews with interested individuals and invested stakeholders. In gathering information about what activities people wanted to use the land for, we learned that hiking is most important to those that filled out the survey. A number of people also emphasized that they enjoy walking the trails with their dog, which is another issue to keep in mind in developing the management plan (especially since a number of people emphasized that dogs should be prohibited from the property). To limit the conflict that could arise from this issue, if the final management plan allows dogs access to the land, signs should be clearly posted encouraging dog owners to be responsible (both by leashing their pet and by cleaning up their pet's waste).

The second most popular activity, cross-country skiing, appears to be important to many respondents as well. This interest could be fostered through the maintenance of the current trails on the property, as well as the development of a trail map. Another popular activity, particularly for families, is snowshoeing. While snowshoeing is generally a minimum impact activity, there could be some disagreement between skiers and snowshoers (as snowshoers, like dogs, often walk on and “destroy” the ski track).

Other popular activities include mountain biking and sledding. With so many people interested in sledding, the town or HLT could host community sledding parties to encourage people to use the land. It might be useful to post signs that encourage people to sled in particular (safe) areas, especially away from the Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST) trail. In terms of mountain biking, while the local mountain biker's organization, Fellowship of the Wheel, would be interested in building new trails (especially beginner and intermediate trails, which they currently lack on the trails of the Town Forest), just using the

existing trails would provide a good alternative to walking the land, with fairly minimal impact. If new trails are constructed, it would be important to develop some sort of stewardship program (similar to what the Fellowship now uses) to see that the trails remain in good condition. It would also be necessary to post signs indicating that multiple activities may be ongoing, such as hunting and biking, so that users can plan accordingly during hunting season.

Other uses that people suggested the town may be able to promote include observing and learning about nature (alone or with a guide), conservation, such as projects in the woods or streams, and picnicking. Many people also said that they were likely to go bird watching on the property.

An activity that a number of people noted as one of the most important, yet which does not fit into the management plan, was the use of ATVs. The town should make sure that this restriction is clearly acknowledged (through signs or boulders restricting access).

While fewer people listed that horse travel, hunting, and snowmobiling were the most important activities to them and their families (question 4B), they are still important to consider in the management plan. Riders like Colin McNaull were adamant that the land should be kept open to horses, insisting that horses can coexist with other users and cause minimal damage (compared to ATVs and other motorized vehicles). Since hunting and snowmobiling are written into the conservation easement, their use is guaranteed, but the town should ensure that these users remain respectful of the land, other users, and nearby property owners through signs and clearly designated trails.

Recreational Conflicts

Our survey gave people the opportunity to identify potential conflicts between different recreational uses. Most people's concerns focused on hunting and snowmobiling. The concerns with snowmobiling revolved around noise pollution, safety, and trail

congestion. Trail sharing between cross-country skiing and snowmobiling was the most frequently reported problem. Much of the discussion of snowmobiling on the Bissonette Property trails revolved around the addition of new trails. Most people accept that snowmobiling already exists on the VAST trail, though some respondents explicitly opposed any motorized recreation on the property, citing that the noise and pollution created would interfere with their experience. Respondents also addressed the issue of maintaining the trails, a task some projected to be expensive and laborious if mountain bikers and horse riders were given access, citing these users as particularly strenuous on trails.

Concerns about hunting were (not surprisingly) centered on safety issues. Nevertheless, many respondents suggested ways that hunting could coexist on the property, such as the proposal that no other activities be allowed on the property during the three weeks of the deer hunting season. When asked whether respondents thought that hunting could coexist with other forms of recreation, opinions were varied and evenly distributed along the spectrum, although 30% of respondents strongly disagreed (Figure 5). As it stands now, on the two non-agricultural plots, hunting is a guaranteed right, so any particularly strong concerns would need to be addressed to all parties involved on the property, including the overseeing body of the Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife.

On a positive note, many of the respondents, even those who believed there to be issues between motorized activities and other forms of recreation, frequently made suggestions for trail sharing ideas. Some proposed having certain trails designated for specific uses (e.g. non-motorized trails and motorized trails) or having rules for how trails should be responsibly used by different activity groups.

Frequency of Use

We also wanted to gain information on the frequency and seasonality of use of the property (Figure 6). The majority of respondents estimated their use of the property would

spread evenly across seasons. Between 30 and 45% of respondents said they would use the property at least once a week and around the same amount expected to use the property at least once a month. It is likely that many respondents said they would use the property more than they actually will, but the response to this question makes it clear that there is a high level of interest in using the property. Ten percent stated that they would never visit the property, which could be attributed to people not interested (or unable) to participate in outdoor activities or respondents not from Hinesburg. The frequency of use results were not surprising given the relatively equal weight of responses in favor of hiking and winter specific sports like snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, and sledding. The opportunity for the property to become a year-round recreation center is a particularly strong selling point that the Hinesburg Land Trust can use to engage the local community.

Conservation Values

Generally speaking, respondents valued the conservation element of the acquisition (Figure 13). The majority of respondents found the conservation initiatives underlying the project very important; specifically, 113 respondents (57%) valued public access to open land, 121 (64%) valued maintaining open/green space, 108 (55%) valued preserving rare ecosystems and species, and 120 (63%) valued maintaining agricultural landscapes.

Furthermore, wetlands and the Indiana Bat were a concern (Figure 12), but more people were concerned with preserving wetlands (99 people, 51%) than specifically protecting the Indiana Bat (74 people, 38%). We identified a potential skewing of results in that respondents were possibly more likely to vehemently agree with vague conservation initiatives as long as they are not expected to personally apply themselves towards advancing those initiatives. Furthermore, all of these proposals were placed in a positive light, avoiding mention of the costs of implementation (e.g., through tax dollars). However, when asked whether they would be willing to have a public trail run through their property (some

respondents excused themselves from this question because they were renters), 126 people (72%) were open to the idea (Figure 14). Furthermore, close to 80% of respondents expressed their interest for walking on trails in both fields and wooded areas (Figure 7), and 113 (63%) suggested that they would be willing to assist in maintaining the trails (Figure 9), additionally validating the majority of Hinesburg residents' commitment to conserved land.

Other Concerns

Our survey also gave respondents the opportunity to elaborate on any of their specific concerns. In addition to the concerns already discussed, a few people highlighted some other themes. Two people mentioned the cost of maintaining public land for town taxpayers. These concerns were mostly in regards to the cost of insurance and maintenance of the land. Andrea Morgante conveyed to us that this has been a common concern, highlighting the necessity for transparency about the process of acquiring the land. This transparency should be extended through the management process so that people understand how the land is being maintained and funded. Of course, the Hinesburg Land Trust cannot talk to each concerned resident, but we recommend holding forums and town meetings to facilitate this communication.

Several people also commented on the residential development occurring on the property. Three people opposed it and wrote that there should be no houses. Conversely, one person suggested that land should not be conserved, but that development should be encouraged so that more housing is available. One person also wrote that the land should be maintained as an active farm. The Hinesburg Land Trust has been through a long process of deciding how to divide the different parcels of land. As noted above we encourage them to be transparent about this process and to explain it to as many people as possible. It is important for people who are opposed to development to know that the development on the Bissonette Property has been significantly downscaled throughout the process as the

HLT has procured more money for the project. Overall we found no overwhelming dissent in our survey collection and people seemed supportive.

E. Application to the Management Plan

Some of our survey questions targeted the specific management of the property, addressing where trails will go and who will maintain them. When asked if people preferred to walk through fields or wooded areas, most people said they enjoyed walking in both habitats. Most of the current trails only run through the woods, so extending the trail network into the fields and wetlands could be considered. One way to extend trails into wetlands is to build boardwalks. When asked what people thought of this proposal, most people agreed that it was a good idea. Several people responded that they would like more information before boardwalks were built to determine whether they would have any adverse effects on the natural ecology of the area. Though boardwalks usually have less impact on surrounding wetlands it should be determined what these impacts might be and where they are permissible.

Within Hinesburg there is a movement to try to create a larger trail network that connects to the village and other existing trails. Most people seemed to be in favor of this, as 72% said they would allow the public to cross their land in order to connect trails. Frank Twarog of the Hinesburg Trails Committee also said that creating a larger network of trails is one of his committee's goals. The interim management plan notes that further development of trails is permissible as long as they do not cross areas of ecological importance on the property, specifically the transitional hardwood limestone talus woodland, sensitive areas of the LaPlatte River corridor, and areas in close proximity to known maternal roosting trees of the Indiana Bat. Given this support, we suggest that the long-term management plan coordinate the development of new trails with the vision of a town-wide trail network in mind.

Frank Twarog also noted that the Trails Committee, which is partially responsible for the maintenance of trails in the Town Forest, could organize volunteer stewards to maintain

the trails on the Bissonette Property. Our results show that 63% of respondents would be interested in helping to maintain trails or with other conservation efforts. Even if the majority would not actually help, it is important to know that there is a certain amount of interest and potential within the community. We thus suggest that the management plan recognizes this maintenance potential and incorporates stipulations for using volunteer labor.

Many of the proposed activities raise issues of possible conflict with other management goals for the Bissonette Property. The management plan clearly explains its purpose of protecting the ecology of the area, and the preliminary LaPlatte River Corridor and Wetlands Management Plan explains actions to be taken against certain invasive species. Some of the proposed activities like horseback riding might bring in more invasive species. Likewise people have expressed that dogs, snowmobiling, and mountain biking may have adverse effects on local wildlife. For these reasons it is necessary that the management plan outline how it plans to monitor ecological health.

One stipulation that is very clear in the interim management plan is the protection of the Indiana Bat. Opening the property to public recreation increases the chances of interfering with bat habitat. Although Kristen Brisse of the Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife agreed that it is unlikely any of the proposed recreation would interfere with bat habitat, there is always the potential that someone may clear a dead snag that is a roosting tree because they see it as a hazard. Stipulations should be made to educate the public about the importance of dead snags in bat habitat.

F. Suggestions for the Hinesburg Land Trust

- 1) Assemble a follow up survey, meeting, or forum to present the results gathered in first survey and allow for another opportunity to collect local input.

It is important for the people of Hinesburg to feel like their opinions matter and affect the overall management plan. Part of this was achieved by our involvement and simply asking people to share their thoughts. Still, it is important to follow up on this process, allowing people to add additional opinions, and to let people know how their ideas will be implemented. Also 73% of survey respondents knew about the Bissonette Property, which is a fairly high percentage but indicates that a number of people could still benefit from learning more about the project.

- 2) Develop a local education program based on the property.

In answering the survey, 134 people (70%) strongly agreed that the Bissonette Property should be incorporated into the local school curriculum (Figure 11). One important resource available and easily accessible for public and classroom use is the Owl's Knoll field guide. Promoted as "a local educator's guide," this document focuses on the rich natural history of the Owl's Knoll piece of the former Bissonette Farm, and while geared toward teachers, can be applied to a much larger audience. The field guide assesses the physical landscape—describing the bedrock, surficial geology, soils, water, and the local climate—and analyzes the living landscape—addressing the diversity of plants and animals, as well as the land use and cultural history of the area. The field guide is sufficiently complete in its descriptions of Owl's Knoll (including species lists, maps, and the breakdown of forest community types among other things) and provides a useful list of contacts and other resources valuable for this or future projects.

3) Organize natural history walks.

In our survey we found a profound interest in nature appreciation, birding, and learning about the natural world. Many people highlighted these themes in the reasons why they would use the Bissonette Property. It would be a good idea to engage these interests by organizing naturalist walks on the property. Such walks would also function to inform people of the ecological importance of the property.

4) Organize a trail maintenance group.

Frank Twarog mentioned that the Hinesburg Trails Committee, which is currently involved in maintaining trails in the Hinesburg Town Forest, would be able to extend this effort to the Bissonette Property. According to our survey results, a fairly large part of the public constituency would be interested in helping to maintain trails. Engaging the public in management would foster a sense of ownership and responsibility for the property.

5) Create a plan to encourage connectivity of town trails.

As discussed above, the survey respondents, the Hinesburg Trails Committee, and the Fellowship of the Wheel are supportive of creating a network of trails that connect the Bissonette Property to the town. This would increase access to the property and allow more town residents to use it for more activities. Connecting a greater network of trails is also advantageous because it would spread out impact, keeping the trails in better shape and improving individual experiences.

6) Increase the publicity of the Hinesburg trails network.

The Hinesburg Trails Committee noted that one of their functions is to make information about the network of trails in Hinesburg available to the residents. It will be important to create recreation maps that include the trails on the Bissonette

Property both to raise awareness of the property in Hinesburg and to promote a sense of comfort and orientation for people using the trails.

- 7) Include in the management plan a means of monitoring ecological health.

As discussed above there are some potential areas of conflict with including public recreation to ecologically sensitive areas such as the increased chances of the spread of invasive species or the disruption of wildlife. The Vermont Land Trust took photographs of certain points on the property in order to monitor major visible changes in ecological health over time. The preliminary LaPlatte River Corridor and Wetland Management Plan also includes a stipulation for taking similar photos of the wetlands region of the property. This effort is the sort of action that needs to be taken and expanded to ensure the ecological health of the areas where there is public recreation.

G. Acknowledgements

We would like to thank several people, without whom, this project could never have been completed. First, and foremost, we would like to thank Andrea Morgante for the contagious energy and enthusiasm that she has put into this project and for sharing with us her seemingly endless knowledge about the project and the town. We would also like to thank our advisors, Steve Trombulak and Diane Munroe, both of whom provided guidance, encouragement, and direction throughout the process. Furthermore, we are indebted to Michelle McCauley for the help she gave us in shaping our survey, as well as to J.S. Woodward for his suggestions. We are especially grateful to those people that we were able to interview, including Frank Twarog, Tom Buzzell, Wayne Bissonette, Colin McNaull, Hans Jenny, Thom Fleury, and Jane Lazorchak, as well as Kristen Brisse and Scott Darling. We are also thankful to the editors of the Hinesburg Record and the Vermont Times Sentinel for publishing our opinion pieces. Moreover, we are most sincerely grateful to Lantman's and their staff, as well as the library and the town hall, without whose support we would have had less than half of the number of completed surveys. Finally, we would like to thank those people who took the time to fill out our survey, as they are the ones who provided us with the foundation for this document to begin with.

Appendix I

Hinesburg Town Survey

1) Are you a resident of Hinesburg? YES NO

2)

3) Are you currently involved in any organizations in the Town of Hinesburg, such as PTA, town planning, Fire Department, etc.? YES NO

Please list all organizations you are a part of:

4) Have you heard that 300 acres of the Bissonette Farm are being donated to the Town of Hinesburg? YES NO

5) A. Keeping in mind that the ultimate goal of this property is conservation of natural resources, what sort of recreational activities would you like to see available on this property? Please indicate how likely you and your family are to engage in the following activities on this land, on a scale of 1-5

	Highly Unlikely	Unlikely	Indifferent	Likely	Very Likely
Hiking	1	2	3	4	5
Horse travel	1	2	3	4	5
Cross country skiing	1	2	3	4	5
Mountain biking	1	2	3	4	5
Bird watching	1	2	3	4	5
Hunting	1	2	3	4	5
Snowmobiling	1	2	3	4	5
Sledding	1	2	3	4	5
Other: _____	1	2	3	4	5

B. In the space below will you please rank the three most important activities to you and your family:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

6) Are there activities listed above that you foresee interfering with each other on this public land?

YES NO

If YES, please explain:

7) Should this land be available for other recreational activities during hunting seasons? (circle one)

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

8) Please indicate how frequently you and your family would use this land during the following seasons (circle one per season):

Summer

At least 1x per week

More than 1x per week

1x per month or less

Never

Fall

At least 1x per week

More than 1x per week

1x per month or less

Never

Winter	At least 1x per week	More than 1x per week	1x per month or less	Never
Spring	At least 1x per week	More than 1x per week	1x per month or less	Never

9) When using walking/hiking trail do you prefer trails through (check one):

- ☐ Fields
☐ Wooded Areas
☐ Both fields and wooded areas

10) It has been suggested that a series of boardwalks be built through the wetlands in the northern part of the property.
Do you think this is a good idea? YES NO

11) Would you be interested in helping maintain the trails or other conservation efforts on the land? YES NO

12) Below is a list of suggested permanent names for this property. Please circle your preferences on a scale of 1 to 5.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Owl's Knoll	1	2	3	4	5
Bissonette Town Forest	1	2	3	4	5
Hinesburg Riparian Town Forest	1	2	3	4	5
Bissonette Farm	1	2	3	4	5
Other: _____	1	2	3	4	5

12) A curriculum that meets state science and social studies standards has been developed to facilitate the use of this land as an outdoor classroom for the local schools. Would you like to see the property used for this purpose?
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

13) This property was purchased in part with federal and state money to protect the endangered Indian Bat and to conserve local wetlands through the VT Clean and Clear Initiative. How important are these to you?

	Very Unimportant	Unimportant	Neutral	Important	Very Important
Indiana Bat	1	2	3	4	5
Wetlands	1	2	3	4	5

14) How important are the following factors to you?

	Very Unimportant	Unimportant	Neutral	Important	Very Important
Public access to land	1	2	3	4	5
Maintaining open/ green space	1	2	3	4	5
Preserving rare ecosystems/ species	1	2	3	4	5
Maintaining VT's agricultural landscape	1	2	3	4	5

15) Would you be willing to let the public cross your land to create a trail network throughout the town? YES NO

16) Please discuss below any other potential concerns you may have about the use and/or management of this new public land.

Appendix II

NEWSPAPER ARTICLE:

Submitted to the weekly newspaper, the Vermont Times Sentinel, for publication in the Saturday, November 11th edition. The goal was to increase awareness about the Bissonette Property and about the survey.

I am a Middlebury College student, and though I get out a fair amount, I am glad for an excuse to head up to Hinesburg. Working with the Hinesburg Land Trust on the acquisition of the Bissonette Farm property, I have discovered this wonderful place where I can catch the afternoon sunshine on the now yellow beech leaves or chase Monarch butterflies through the clover.

While the Bissonette Farm is the perfect place to spend a sunny afternoon in October, my goals today are to learn about a unique aspect of the forest: the ecology and habitat requirements of the federally endangered Indiana Bat that roosts and breeds here in the summer. I meet up with wildlife biologist Kristen Brisse of the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Service, who points out three trees where a female was raising a pup this summer. Characterized by a large forest patch surrounded by meadows and agricultural land, the Bissonette Farm provides a unique and important habitat for these bats. The attached wetlands also provide important foraging habitat for the bats, which can eat their weight in insects each night during pregnancy.

The discovery of the presence of the Indiana Bat on the Bissonette Property allowed the state to receive a \$500,000 grant to help acquire the land. Preserving the Bissonette farm will not only protect habitat for important species like the Indiana Bat, but will also expand recreational opportunities and protect the scenic rural landscape of Hinesburg.

The Hinesburg Land Trust wants to hear your opinions and thoughts on the use and value of the Bissonette property. A survey will be available the week of October 29th at the Town Hall, the Library, local grocery stores, and online. Please participate in the planning of your land and let us know what you think.

Appendix III

NEWSPAPER ARTICLE:

Submitted to the monthly newspaper, the Hinesburg Record, for the December 6th edition. This article attempted to speak to the residents of Hinesburg that we might not have heard from in our survey, especially those less conservation-minded.

A Standing Ovation for Hinesburg

Not every town gives you the opportunity to attend a different planning meeting each night of the week to have your voice heard. And not every town has an active organization working to conserve land important for wildlife habitat, wetlands, and recreation. That's probably because not every town is like Hinesburg, Vermont.

As a native Vermonter and currently a senior at Middlebury College, my respect for the values of Vermont and its citizens runs deep. My family is steeped in traditions such as chicken pie suppers, hiking through Vermont's forests, and the annual exodus to deer camp. These days we have begun to incorporate new activities into our routine like mountain biking and cross-country skiing. The beauty of Vermont, and a place like Hinesburg, is that you can do all of these things very close to home.

That is what I find most intriguing about a piece of the Bissonette property that the town of Hinesburg recently acquired. As of November 1, 2007, the Hinesburg Land Trust, together with their partners the Trust for Public Land and the Vermont Land Trust, completed a real estate transaction that resulted in the donation of 301 acres to the town to become a new town forest. Many of you have probably walked some of the old woods trails that wind through hardwood stands, passing the stream that serves as the headwaters for the LaPlatte River. If you haven't, it's certainly worth exploring!

I became involved with this property three months ago when my seminar in environmental studies began working with community partners, mine being with Andrea Morgante of the HLT. Our goal was to provide the land trust with information about how Hinesburg residents would be interested in using the new land. Some of you may recall meeting us in Lantman's with the request of filling out our survey. Thank you for those who took the time—we now have 127 responses and hope to incorporate your opinions into the management plan. For anyone who would still like their voice heard, please contact me, at jmorrison@middlebury.edu or Andrea Morgante at morgante@gmavt.net and continue to foster that spirit of participation that is so apparent in Hinesburg!

Appendix IV

Interview Transcripts

Frank Twarog, Chair of Hinesburg Trails Committee

The trails committee, consisting of nine voluntary positions (with eight currently filled) as well as four to five continuously participating non-members, began four years ago as a reaction to the growing interest in Hinesburg to create a “walkable town” and individuals’ dislike of the idea of driving to recreate. The goal was to develop a network of trails that would offer the majority of townspeople recreation options without stepping into a car. While creating physical trails for activities such as hiking and biking was a major aspiration, the hope was also to establish a close connection between neighbors, businesses, and beyond.

The focus of the trails committee is to make Hinesburg residents aware of the many trails currently available on public land. A secondary focus is working with private landowners to negotiate easements with the ultimate goal of creating a network of connected trails throughout the town. This is where the committee sees great potential in the Bissonette property acquisition, as the new town forest could provide the next link in the trail network. The trails committee could be instrumental in working with private landowners on nearby property that might be willing to incorporate their land into this network.

The committee could also play an important maintenance role; currently they employ “voluntary stewards” who care for specific trails (in the Town Forest). These stewards maintain the basic upkeep of the trails independently, but can call on the town for assistance in larger projects (such as big washouts or trail abuse). The steward is generally a user that lives nearby the trail and can address complaints raised by other landowners (or the property owner) in the vicinity. The trails committee would like to see the Bissonette property used in the same way the Town Forest is currently being used (with hiking, biking, and other recreational uses) and believes creating new trails could be beneficial if done in a responsible manner with a low environmental impact, as has occurred in the Town Forest. One source of contention that could arise out of this, however, is, if the Fellowship of the Wheel creates the trails, it will be important to address horse traffic, since that was an issue that arose in the Town Forest (i.e., the mountain bikers that created the trails did not do so with horse travel in mind and local horseback riders felt slighted).

Hans Jenny, President of the Fellowship of the Wheel

The Fellowship of the Wheel (FOW) is “a mountain biking advocacy group that has a very strong record of working with towns, private landowners, and the state to build and maintain trails for non-motorized use” according to president of the club, Hans Jenny. The group has been in existence for 11 years and has approximately 300 members around Chittenden County. Over the years the FOW has built close to 15 miles of trails in the Hinesburg Town Forest, as well as being involved with other trail building projects in Williston, Jericho, and Essex, which “a large number of the population enjoy for everything from dog walking to mountain biking.” The way the group generally goes about their projects is by asking a landowner permission to build trails on the property and then amassing a group of volunteers that begin the trail building process. Unlike some trailbuilders, the Fellowship of the Wheel focuses on “creating a beautiful route that encompasses the available land features,” rather than simply drawing a straight line from point A to point B. Thus, the Fellowship’s trails are often very winding, going over interesting roots and rocks or along skinny ridgelines. This type of trail is very amenable to

hiking, biking, and snowshoeing, but is more difficult for use by cross-country skiers and really does not coincide with use by horse travelers. Horse travel is often not sensible on the trails mainly because in areas where a bridge might need to be built, a bridge meant for mountain bikers and hikers would not hold up to the weight of horses.

Hans showed a lot of enthusiasm for the possibility of his group being involved with the Bissonette Property, although he was most excited about the possibility of building new trails on the land beyond simply using the existing logging roads (although he suggested that the logging roads would make excellent access points between trails). Hans noted that the Fellowship really focuses on having minimal impact when building trails, not taking down large trees and not building trails in very wet areas or areas highly susceptible to erosion (like down fall lines). He also mentioned that new mountain biking trails on the Bissonette Property could be a great addition to the town because the trails in the Town Forest are currently geared towards intermediate and expert riders due to the large changes in elevation and the topography of that area. Since the Bissonette Property has less change in elevation, it would be ideal for some beginner and intermediate trails, which would encourage newcomers in the town to try out the sport.

Hans noted that in order to get to the Town Forest, one has to drive a significant distance out of the village, and the Bissonette Property would thus be an ideal location for trails because of its close proximity to the town center. He also talked about the possibility of extending the current trail system on the Town Forest onto the property of an adjacent landowner, Philip Carr, who recently gave the Fellowship access to 1,000 acres. This could be the next step in creating the larger trail network that Frank Twarog and the rest of the Hinesburg Trails Committee envision. A point Hans made in defense of the complaint some have presented that many outsiders come to Hinesburg to use the trails on the Town Forest is that it is really a give and take situation. Many residents of Hinesburg also go up to Burlington and Jericho to use the trails up there, and the amount of activity currently on the trails is quite sustainable, as well as an opportunity to capitalize on people coming into the town from outside and spending money in Hinesburg.

Jane Lazorchak, Coordinator of Land Owner Incentive Program, Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife

The Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife has been actively involved with this project prior to the acquisition of the new town forest. Through the Endangered Species Act, the FWD contributed \$500,000 towards attaining the two forested parcels that contain bat habitat. Two activities that the public value on the property are hunting and trapping, which will continue to be open during all seasons as a permanently guaranteed right. The new town forest parcel will see the most hunting pressure because it is contiguous with other land where hunting has existed for a long time. If the town or the Hinesburg Land Trust believes that hunting poses a safety problem or does not coexist well with other recreational activities, they would need to convene all interested parties, including the Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife. The parcel on the east side of the road was purchased by a private buyer, with a significant conservation easement, to protect the habitat of the Indiana bat and a section of clayplain forest. While the easement guarantees public access, hunting is essentially at the discretion of the property owner. The farming plots are unlikely to be used for hunting because of significant agricultural activity.

Thom Fleury, Assistant Principle of the Hinesburg Community School

Thom Fleury explained that currently there is not a lot of outdoor learning going on at the school, although he would like it to increase in the future. Currently some teachers incorporate the use other resources such as the Ethan Allen Monument into the school

curriculum. Thom believes that the Bissonette Property, being that it is only about a mile away, would be very useful and many teachers would be very interested in using it.

Seventy percent of the people who took our survey agreed that the use of the Bissonette Property should be incorporated into the school curriculum. Thom gave two possible explanations as to why the other 30% may have disagreed: the issue of safety and the saturation of the current curriculum. Many people feel that the existing curriculum is already tight and time intensive. Therefore, they may not want to squeeze additional activities into the curriculum.

Thom said that each subject taught at the Community School has its own local department committee in charge of granting the approval of the incorporation of the outdoor classroom into the school curriculum. Thom added that it would not be difficult for teachers, especially social science teachers, to show a strong tie between the outdoor classroom and the existing curriculum in order to receive the committee's approval. The school teaches social science from K-8, and Thom could see the classes from all those levels using the property in the near future. The most important thing right now according to Thom is to get the word out to the teachers.

Tom Buzzell: Resident of Hinesburg

Tom moved from Middlebury to Hinesburg on the summer of 2006. He is currently a principle at the Mary Hogan School in Middlebury. Tom is currently not involved in any organization in the Town of Hinesburg nor has he been directly involved with any other public land projects like the town forest. He has however been an active member of the Nature Conservancy and North forest conservation trails as well as other outdoor recreational clubs. In the interview Tom expressed that the Hinesburg Land Trust has been doing a good job at publicizing and educating the residence about the Bissonette Property.

As a residence, a parent to four children who attend the local school in Hinesburg, he believes that it will be very easy as well as important to incorporate the Bissonette Property into the local school curriculum in order to teach students about their local history and local traditions. There are many aspects about outdoor learning that already exist in the school curriculum, therefore the school may not need state approval to add the Bissonette Property into the curriculum.

Though Tom is not a hunter, he believes that it is important to preserve the VT local history of hunting. However, he is concern about the safety issues of land use sharing between hunting and other recreational use. He has confidence that most hunters are careful and respects the regulations; however that confidence does not extend to all hunters. Therefore it will be best to have some separation between hunting and other activities.

Wayne Bissonette, Property Seller

Wayne Bissonette, owner of the Bissonette miniature horse farm, decided to enter into a deal with the HLT, the VLT, and the Trust for Public Land in order to ensure that the 627 acres of land sold remain undeveloped in the future. Wayne would like to see the land continue to be used as it has been in the past, especially for snowmobiling, hiking, hunting, mountain biking, and cross country skiing, as well as other uses that have occurred over the years. While he is not opposed to ATV use, he understands that ATVs can cause problems to the land and can lead to issues with local farmers when ATV users leave gates open and unintentionally allow animals out of their pastures. Wayne was not terribly concerned about vandalism, saying that there had not been many problems with it in the past, and he did not foresee it increasing with the town's ownership of the land.

Colin McNaul, Property Owner of Land Bordering Part of the Acquired Property

Colin McNaul, long time resident of Hinesburg whose family has been in Vermont longer than it has been its own state, is an avid horse rider and currently rides on the Bissonette Property in the spring, summer, and fall, generally two or three days a week. He also walks his dog on the property throughout the year and cross country skis there with his wife during the winter. Colin lives on South Wind Road, just south of a piece of the property sold by the Bissonettes (although not adjacent to the new town forest). Colin would like to continue using the land as he has in the past and would be especially upset if horse travel were restricted. He believes that out-of-staters are the main culprits in egregious damage to the land by horses and contends that while horses can “chew up the ground,” ATVs and motorcycles cause significantly more damage. While he disagrees with this type of motorized vehicles, he has no problem with mountain bikes. As a coordinator of an HLT fundraiser for the past 15 years as well as an advocate for various running/walking/biking activities in Hinesburg, he would like to see people taking more advantage of the land than they currently do.

Kristen Brisse, Wildlife Biologist for the Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife

Kristen Brisse is one of the biologists responsible for determining the presence of the Indiana Bat on the Bissonette Property. She gave us a tour and pointed out several snags that she had determined as maternal roosting trees. None of the main maternal roost trees border the existing recreational trails. Kristen also noted that she did not see any reason for conflict with the prescribed recreational activities as long as they did not destroy these maternal roost trees.